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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

Fred Horvat

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"

Well, Spring is unofficially here! A group of us traveled to Cape Cod last weekend and got in a round of golf. True, it was relatively cold and windy, but the sun was shining brightly and it was a nice day. Okay, so the course was wet, and the greens were soaked, but it was nice to get out, limber up, and play 18 holes. I didn't play too well, but better than I had expected for the first time out this year. And, I love the new irons!

Well, the week went downhill from there! The weather got worse - at least temperature-wise. Then my mouth starts to hurt, and I realize that I've got a bad tooth or something. Get a quick appointment, and I have an infection. Knock that down and go back to have a tooth pulled. Work still sucks, to the point where I'm sending out some feelers. I love my job - I really do, but the aggravation often makes it difficult. It may be time for a change of scenery; and retirement isn't that far off.

So, on a lighter note, "happy-everybody's-Irish" today! Happy St. Patricks Day! It's the time for green beer, leprechauns, boiled corned beef and cabbage, and everything else Irish! Enjoy!

Until next time...

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->A-ONE User Group Notes! - Meetings, Shows, and Info!

CCAG Show 2006

It's a new year which means a new CCAG Show!

Buy, sell, trade, play, and see classic video games, computers, peripherals, memorabilia, and more at the Classic Computing and Gaming Show (CCAG) on May 27, 2006 (and again in October, 2006) at the National Guard Armory, 3520 Grove Ave. Lorain, Ohio from 5:00 PM - 9:00 PM.

Vendors, clubs, and collectors will be displaying and selling their retrogaming and retrocomputing goods, from Pong and Atari to Nintendo, Apple and IBM to Commodore and everything in between with many set up for you to play with and explore. We have 5000+ square feet of space. Help us fill it all up!

For more information please go to http://www.ccagshow.com/

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. This week's column is going to be short and sweet. I've had a sinus infection since last week, and the antibiotic that I've been taking doesn't seem to be doing the trick. "Give it time to work", the doctor says, but it seems to me that I should be feeling at least a little better after 8 days. Ya think?

Actually, the antibiotic is one of those new-fangled ones that you only take for 5 days, but it's supposed to build up and stay in your system for ten. Either nobody told my body that it's supposed to hang onto the stuff for twice the normal time, or the infection is resistant to the stuff. Just my luck, huh?

It's no wonder that it seems like humanity has gotten just about as stupid as it can. Now, I'm not a baby when I'm sick, but I've got one nerve left, and this little bug beastie is getting on it! Know what I mean? I'm usually the type that just wants to be left alone when he's sick. But more than a week of the pressure and pain... coupled with the neat things that antibiotics can do to your system... has left me short tempered and easily annoyed.

So, my little bit of wisdom to you this week is...

If your doctor asks you if you want that five day antibiotic that works for ten days, tell him that you'd rather stay with the tried-and-true stuff.

Now let's get to the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Guillaume Tello asks for info about networking:

"Just for fun, I'd like to create a little net linking my Mega STE and TT. What software exists? What speed can I expect? What cable?"

Didier Briel tells Guillaume:

"I would recommend using standard network software:
STiNG seems a good choice for that.
Once the network is on, you can use a FTP and a web server, as well as clients, of course, to communicate between the two machines.

The best reliable speed you can get on the Mega STE is 115200. You *can* use 230400, but in my experience the resulting speed is actually slower.

That's with a standard serial cable.

Another solution, more expensive, would be to use two network cards (one on each machine). In this case, the speed is of course much faster."

Guillaume also asks about drivers for a NOVA graphics card:

"I have bought a NOVA graphic card (ET 4000+VME adaptor) but without the drivers. I have used the drivers from another NOVA I already have.

But nothing works! The desktop appears but you can see 3 or 4 times the image being repeated in the width and using half of the height. I changed the monitor: nothing (black) on the other. Could it be a problem with the drivers? Does anyone have them?"

Edward Baiz tells Guillaume:

"I have version 2.67 of the driver for my ATI NOva card in my Hades. There are some utilities that came with the drive that allow you to adjust things. Do you have these programs?"

Guillaume replies:

"Thanks Edward, I've been sent the correct version I needed. Now everything runs fine."

Well folks, that's it for this week. It's been a tough week and there weren't a lot of messages in the NewsGroup this time around. Maybe next week I'll be able to report that both situations have gotten better. We'll see. 'Till then, keep your eye on the horizon, your shoulder to the wheel, your back to the wind, your and your ear to the ground. See ya next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - PlayStation 3 Not Until November?
Tough Year for Game Industry!
Women Gamers!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Sony's PlayStation 3 Delayed Until November

Sony Corp. will push back the release of its new PlayStation 3 video game console until early November because development of the copy protection technology for the Blu-ray Disc has fallen behind schedule, the Nikkei Keizai business daily said on Tuesday.

Sony, maker of the market-leading PlayStation 2 console, announced the PS3 last May and said it would be launched this spring.

The Nikkei said consumer electronics makers and movie companies have been unable to reach an agreement on the development of the copy protection technology.

Sony's much-anticipated next-generation video game console will be powered by a Cell high-performance chip and feature a Blu-ray Disc drive. The console is expected to enable users to play games and movies as well as downloading and viewing high-quality videos from the Internet.

More than 100 million PlayStation 2 consoles have been shipped worldwide to date.

Rival Microsoft Corp. released its next-generation Xbox 360 console in late 2005 and Nintendo Co. Ltd. plans to start selling its Revolution console this year.

Tough Year for Game Industry

Sony's decision to delay the debut of the PlayStation 3 video game console until this fall will likely make 2006 a rocky year for the video game industry.

The company said in Japan Wednesday it would delay the PlayStation 3 launch from the spring of this year to November. Many in the game industry had already anticipated the delay because of Sony's troubles integrating new high-definition storage technology into the PlayStation 3. Gamers will be disappointed they will have to wait longer for Sony's first new home console since 2000, and some may settle for an Xbox 360.

‘‘I don’t view it as a delay because everyone was planning on it being in the fall if not later," said Anita Frazier, a game analyst at market researcher NPD Group. ‘‘There is some relief it’s not going to be delayed longer."

Still, the consequences will be heavy for people who develop new video games and their publishers, who are gathering next week in San Jose for the annual Game Developers Conference.

However, Microsoft is likely to be a big beneficiary of the delay. The company launched its competing game console, the Xbox 360, during the 2005 holiday season. But it’s had trouble manufacturing enough consoles due to various component shortages. That still persists.

‘‘This will give Microsoft a chance to become a real competitor to Sony," said Sid Shuman, a contributing editor for GamePro magazine. ‘‘Game players are passionate, but they’re pragmatists. If they have set aside $400 for the PS 3, they’ll probably pick up an Xbox 360 now."

He added, ‘‘For the long run, it means the game industry will be more competitive and Sony may not dominate as much as it did before. We have a real rumble waiting in the wings."

Frazier said Microsoft had only shipped 160,000 Xbox 360 consoles in the United States in February, bringing the U.S. total to only 1 million units since November. By comparison, Sony sold more than 300,000 PlayStation 2 consoles last month. The Sony PlayStation 3 delay gives Microsoft more opportunity to recover from the shortage and try to meet demand before it faces competition.

Game publishers, meanwhile, are already in a state of turmoil because the Xbox 360 shortage has hurt sales of new games, and consumers aren’t buying as many older games either. Electronic Arts, the largest independent maker of video game software, had to lay off 5 percent of its employees, and other companies, such as Midway and Atari, have followed suit.

The part of the industry that is healthy is the handheld game-player business. Sales of Nintendo’s DS and Sony’s PlayStation Portable are strong, Frazier said.

One of the wild cards is Nintendo. The Japanese game company will launch its Revolution console this year, but it hasn’t said when. Nintendo’s chief executive, Satoru Iwata, will give a speech next Thursday to game developers.

Sony said Tuesday it would release the PlayStation 3 worldwide on Nov. 11. The company delayed the release because of troubles integrating Blu-ray, the high-definition storage drives that can store movies or games in HD formats. The cost of Blu-ray technology is high, driving the cost of the PlayStation 3 to as much as $750, said Rick Doherty, an analyst at the Envisioneering Group.

By delaying the launch, Sony can bring the costs down but it said it will likely charge more than $425. That gives Microsoft, which sells the full version of the Xbox 360 for $399, a chance to undercut Sony on price. Microsoft could also line up its next blockbuster game, ‘‘Halo 3," to launch at the same time the PlayStation 3 becomes available.

The delay will likely benefit Sony’s game developers, too.

‘‘The PS 3 isn’t easy to develop for, and this gives the developers more breathing room," Doherty said.

Women Gamers Move Up the Charts

The first gaming memory Jamie Pereyda can recall is playing a DOS-based Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles game with her brothers. She’s moved up since then. The 19-year-old from San Jose, California, is the first woman ever to enter the GGL World Rankings of gamers. She is 96th on the list.

Pereyda also is one of two leaders of the all-female international online gaming team "girlz 0f destruction," a group she and her fellow team leader created in October 2001. Now the seven-member team travels the world to compete in the shooter game Quake4.

Therese "Trito" Andersson, Jamie "Missy" Pereyda, and Alana "Ms.X" Reid show off their Quake4 tournament winnings. Their nicknames are their gaming names. Pereyda entered the GGL (Global Gaming League) World Rankings after gaining a top position in the female Quake4 one-to-one tournament at the ASUS Winter Cup in Moscow. The tourney is one of the most prestigious and famous gaming events in Eastern Europe. Winning last year’s women’s QuakeCon tournament with her team also helped.

Spurred by her success, the entire "girlz 0f destruction" team now fights for positions on the GGL list. The women come from all over the world: Jamie "Missy" Pereyda is from the United States, Alana "Ms.X" Reid is from Canada, Therese "Trito" Andersson is from Sweden, Ana "aNouC" Oliveras is from Spain, Livia "Liefje" Teernstra is from New Zealand, Dasha "Barbie" Laposhina is from Russia, and Sabrina "Karma" Chen is from China.

Team road manager Sara Bustoz of the United States (far left) poses with house residents Therese Andersson (second from left), Jamie Pereyda, and Alana Reid (far right).Four team members recently moved into the first-ever dedicated eSports home, which is subsidized by Taipei-based team sponsor Via Technologies, a global supplier of high-end computer hardware. The house is situated right in the heart of the European gaming community, in the city of Sollentuna, some 10 miles north of Stockholm, Sweden.

There’s plenty of money in the gaming pot. All in all, the PC gaming industry estimates global sales of around $20 billion and U.S. sales of around $7 billion in 2005. The house, which cost Via about $250,000 this year, is named "Home of Chrome," after Via’s and S3 Graphics’ Chrome brand and Chrome S27.

Moving far away from family and friends, even changing countries, has been one of the toughest issues, the "girlz" say. But it can be worth it. PC gaming is increasingly competitive, and tournament prizes are escalating. For instance, the Cyberathlete Professional League (CPL) in 2005 gave out a total of $1 million in prizes on its world tour.

To attract the best sparring partners, the "girlz 0f destruction" will host both amateur and professional gamers, as well as others interested in the eSports lifestyle. Already, guests from the professional gaming community are coming to play in the house.

Members of the "girlz 0f destruction" gaming team with Russian soldiers during a tournament in Moscow.And there is a lot of space. The LAN gaming

room, equipped with the latest gaming gear from Via, is called the Kremlin, since it is a huge open space pretty much like Moscow’s Red Square. Add to that a veranda and a balcony for nice summer evenings, and a sunroom and sauna for relaxing after long hours of practicing.

They have global vision, too. "In Asia gaming is much bigger than here. In Korea, for instance, there are at least eight channels that broadcast gaming tournaments, like football here, and I think we’ll see more of that in Europe and North America as well," explains Canadian Alana Reid, Jamie Pereyda’s fellow team leader.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Program Teaches Kids About Cyber Security

A group of students at Rome Catholic School are learning how to become the future defenders of cyberspace through a pilot program that officials say is the first of its kind in the country.

The program teaches students about data protection, computer network protocols and vulnerabilities, security, firewalls and forensics, data hiding, and infrastructure and wireless security.

Most importantly, officials said, teachers discuss ethical and legal considerations in cyber security.

"It’s a great course. It’s a littler harder than I expected," said Catherine Gudaitis, a junior interested in theater. "But I know in the world I’m going to live in, this will be necessary information, even common knowledge."

President Bush made cyber security a focal point in February 2003 in his National Strategy to Secure Cyberspace, citing the importance of safeguarding America from crippling Internet-based attacks by terrorists against U.S. power grids, airports and other targets.

The pilot program was developed with help from computer experts at the U.S. Air Force’s Research Lab in Rome, who four years ago created a 10-week long Advanced Course in Engineering Cyber Security Boot Camp for the military’s Reserve Officers Training Corps, said Kamal Jabbour, the lab’s principal computer engineer.

"Besides teaching teenagers to protect their digital assets, the course opens their imagination to the challenges in cyberspace, and seeks to excite them into a college education in computer engineering and a professional career in cyber security," Jabbour said.

While computer courses are commonplace in American schools, the Rome program "is not just a little different. This is a step change," said Eric

Spina, dean of Syracuse University's engineering and computer science programs, which also helped with the pilot's development.

Spina said the material covered in the course is subject matter that college students - even engineering and computer science majors - typically don't receive until their junior year.

"A high school student with this kind of background would be an asset anywhere they went," Spina said.

Although young people are more technologically savvy than ever, they too frequently dabble in high-tech mischief. Rome's program is an effort to rechannel that native interest, said Principal Christopher Mominey.

Thirteen students are enrolled in the 20-week elective course, which began with the start of the current semester Jan. 31. The class meets for 45 minutes after school four days a week, with two of the sessions devoted to lab time, said Ed Nickerson, one of three teachers who designed the curriculum.

With financial support from Rome Lab and Syracuse University, the school transformed a one-time home economics classroom into a 12-station wireless computer lab.

Nickerson said the students - sophomores, juniors and seniors - represent a wide spectrum of both academic ability and computer know-how. The school has approximately 400 students grades kindergarten through 12th, and a senior class this year of 18.

The curriculum will be offered statewide beginning next year. On Friday, several dozen administrators and educators attended a workshop at the Rome school as an introduction. A weeklong course will be offered in August to prepare high school teachers to teach cyber security. If successful, the program could be offered nationwide in 2008, Jabbour said.

The program was developed through a congressional grant obtained by U.S. Rep. Sherwood Boehlert (news, bio, voting record), chairman of the House Science Committee. Boehlert said U.S. Air Force Secretary Michael Wynne offered assurances during his recent visit to Rome Lab that if the program is successful, it will be included in the budget as a permanent item.

Microsoft To Offer Free Parental Web Monitoring

Microsoft Corp. said on Monday it plans to include a free service to help parents control and monitor what their children are doing online in its upcoming Windows Live offering of Web services.

The monitoring of children online has become a hot-button subject due to a nationwide string of cases involving adult sexual predators using virtual-communities on the Internet like MySpace.com to meet child victims.

Windows Live is part of Microsoft's strategy to consolidate a range of Web services - e-mail, instant messaging, online PC security and blogs - to compete with Google Inc. and Yahoo Inc. for Internet advertising dollars.

Windows Live is being tested now and will launch sometime in the second half of 2006.

Microsoft plans to roll out Windows Live Family Safety Settings in the summer, which will allow parents to filter Web sites and receive reports to see what their children are doing online.

The company also plans to eventually allow parents to control who communicates with their children over e-mail, instant messaging and in their blogs.

Such software already exists as part of bundled PC security offerings from Trend Micro Inc., Symantec Corp. and McAfee Inc. and stand-alone products from CyberPatrol and NetNanny, owned by LookSmart Ltd.

The software giant already offers a similar service under its subscription-based MSN premium, but Microsoft said customers are increasingly asking for the service to be free.

Microsoft said while parents often say they want to monitor their child's activities online, they are often put off by the amount of work and sometimes complexity involved in the process.

The company aims to simplify the process by allowing a parent, or administrator, to monitor every family member's Web activities within Windows Live. The service is only available for certain versions of Windows XP Service Pack 2 and will be compatible with the upcoming Windows Vista operating system.

Netscape Reportedly Trying for a Comeback

Several news reports suggest Time Warner plans to resurrect its once high-flying Netscape division by turning it into a social networking hub.

Media tracker Paid Content.org says the Netscape name is soon to be attached to a social networking Web site, in which news stories and other items can be freely traded.

In order to do this, over the last few weeks Netscape owner Time Warner has fired some of its Netscape-focused employees and plans to install a new director, Jason Calacanis, according to the ValleyWag Web site. Time Warner owns Weblogs, which Calacanis runs.

Both reports claim the moves are a new effort to resurrect the once-mighty Netscape brand name.

A representative for Time Warner, which owns Weblogs, didn't immediately respond to a message seeking comment.

Netscape's merely a blip on the Internet radar nowadays. But in the mid-to-late 1990s, its Web browser and Internet portal ruled the roost.

Netscape's undoing may have well been its infamous, and bruising, battles with Microsoft over Internet browsers.

ICANN to Test Non-English Domain Names

The Internet’s key oversight agency has outlined a plan for testing domain names entirely in non-English characters, bringing closer to reality a change highly sought by Asian and Arabic Internet users.

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers announced a tentative timetable Tuesday that calls for tests to begin in the second half of the year. The tests would help ensure that introducing non-English suffixes wouldn’t wreck a global addressing system that millions of Internet users rely upon every day.

The Internet’s main traffic directories know only 37 characters: the 26 letters of the Latin script used in English, the 10 numerals and a hyphen.

Constraining non-English speakers to those characters is akin to forcing all English-speakers to type domains in Chinese. As a result, ICANN has faced pressures to adopt technical tricks that let the directories understand other languages.

In fact, some aren’t waiting. China already has set up its own ".com" in Chinese within its borders. Such efforts risk fracturing the Internet, such that the same address could reach two different sites depending on a user’s location.

Even if the tests are successful, though, several policy questions remain. For example, should the incumbent operator of global domains like ".com" automatically get a Chinese version, or does that more properly goes to China, as its government insists?

Resolving those questions could take time, and domain names entirely in another language likely won’t begin appearing until next year or even later.

Bill Gates Mocks MIT’s $100 Laptop Project

Microsoft Corp. Chairman and Chief Software Architect Bill Gates on Wednesday mocked a $100 laptop computer for developing countries being developed with the backing of rival Google Inc. at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The $100 laptop project seeks to provide inexpensive computers to people in developing countries. The computers lack many features found on a typical personal computer, such as a hard disk and software.

"The last thing you want to do for a shared use computer is have it be something without a disk ... and with a tiny little screen," Gates said at the Microsoft Government Leaders Forum in suburban Washington.

"Hardware is a small part of the cost" of providing computing capabilities, he said, adding that the big costs come from network connectivity, applications and support.

Before his critique, Gates showed off a new "ultra-mobile computer" which runs Microsoft Windows on a seven-inch touch screen.

Those machines are expected to sell for between $599 and $999, Microsoft said at the product launch last week.

"If you are going to go have people share the computer, get a broadband connection and have somebody there who can help support the user, geez, get a decent computer where you can actually read the text and you're not sitting there cranking the thing while you're trying to type," Gates said.

Gates described the computers as being for shared use, but the project goes under the name "One Laptop per Child." A representative for the project did not immediately reply to an inquiry seeking comment.

Earlier this year, Google founder Larry Page said his company is backing MIT's project. He showed a model of the machine that does use a crank as one source of power.

"The laptops ... will be able to do most everything except store huge amounts of data," according to the project's Web site.

One In 10 British Teens 'Cyberbullied'

One in 10 British teenagers have been a victim of "cyberbullying", where they receive threatening emails or have unpleasant rumours about them spread on the Internet, a study said.

Computer giant MSN's survey of 500 teenagers found that half thought their parents were unaware that children could be bullied over the Internet, while 13-year-olds were most likely to suffer from the problem.

John Carr, chairman of Children's Charities' Coalition for Internet Safety, said: "We're hearing from an increasing number of teenagers who have needlessly suffered cyberbullying for days, weeks and even months in silence.

"The effects of this bullying can impact everything from morale through to school work and friendships as teenagers can end up isolated from or even afraid of the communications tools they use daily."

Natalie Mead, head of citizenship at MSN UK, said that the Internet was the hub of teenagers' positive social communication with friends.

"So when it's threatened, the effect can be devastating," she said.

MSN urged teenagers to guard their identity online and said they should not be afraid to complain if they received offensive messages.

Clever Phishers Dodge Spoofed Site Shutdowns

Fraudsters are using a new technique to keep their spoofed Web sites up and running even as authorities pull the plug, a security expert said this week.

According to RSA Security's Naftali Bennett, the senior vice president of its Cyota anti-fraud division, some phishers have started using a tactic called "smart site redirection" to stay a step ahead of the law.

"The goal of the phisher is to keep his spoofed site alive as long as possible," said Bennett. The longer the site remains active, the more victims a phisher can dupe into divulging confidential information such as bank or credit account usernames, passwords, and PINs.

In a smart site redirection, the attacker creates several identical copies of the spoofed site, each with a different URL, often hosted by different ISPs. When the phishing e-mails go out, all include a link to yet another site, a "central redirector." When the potential victim clicks on the e-mailed link, the redirector checks all the phishing sites, identifies which are still live, and invisibly redirects the user to one.

Clever, said Bennett, but just the latest in what he called a "battle of brains" between phishers and security firms.

"This is a new evolution in their tactics to lengthen the duration of the attack," he said.

Phishers first hosted their spoofed site at only one location, but defenders got wise and would track down the site's Internet service provider and convince it to shut down the illegal URL. "The average duration for a phishing site is still 5 or 6 days," said Bennett, although vendors like Cyota, which monitors developing phishing attacks to warn its clients, can trim that to four hours or so.

Next, phishers took to sending out their link-infested spam in several waves, each wave with a pointer to a different spoofed site. Again, said Bennett, their goal was to stretch out the attack time to maximize returns. "They'd send out, say, 20 million e-mails, but divided into five batches several days apart, each sent to a different site so that there would always be at least one site up and running."

Now, he said, they've turned to the central redirector technique. "They'll still send out their 20 million messages, but they do it all at once, all with the link to the central redirection site. They get the maximum coverage in the shortest period," he added, which means that security firms and victimized brands don't get an early warning by an initial wave of messages.

So far, Cyota has spotted two instances of the tactic, one by an attack out of the U.K., the other from Canada.

"As anti-phishing vendors become more adept at shutting down phishing websites, inevitably the fraudsters are looking at ways to minimize the effect this has on their hit rates," said Bennett.

To combat the technique, Cyota relies on a several-step process, which starts when a phishing attack first hits its radar. The company, said Bennett, processes millions of e-mails daily looking for phishing evidence. When it sees an attack, it first uploads the spoofed site(s) to ISP partners, which include AOL and EarthLink, so that they can engage blocks that restrict members' access to the site(s).

Next, they begin urging the site's host to bring down the spoof. "After two years doing this, we have a fairly robust relationship with most ISPs worldwide," Bennett said, "but there are still times when we have to explain who we are and what we do."

The third step, said Bennett, is that until the spoofed site goes offline, Cyota floods it with spurious information. "It's not a denial-of-service

attack. We never do that," Bennett said. "But we bombard the site with phony data that looks real, like names and address and account numbers and passwords. The idea is to dilute the quality of the data gathered by the attack."

Finally, Cyota captures as much information about the site, as well as the e-mail campaign that started the phishing attack, and hands it all over to the client for its own use, or for it to turn over to law enforcement.

"In a sense this is reactive," Bennett admitted, "but we've set up a strategic team that's looking not only at attacks against existing customers, but also surfs forums and underground sites where phishers gather to try and identify what's in store for tomorrow."

Microsoft Sues to Prevent Bootlegging on eBay

In a continuing effort to crack down on distributors of illegal software, Microsoft this week filed suit against eight users of eBay's auction site for allegedly selling counterfeit copies of the company's software online.

Microsoft filed the suits in Arizona, Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New York, and Washington, each a state where a defendant is located, the company said.

Defendants named in the suits are seven private citizens - Agus Chandra, Igor Goldshteyn, John Hilaire, Jaike Hornreich, Edward Shklovsky, Jay D. Smith, and Billy Williams - and one company, Great Product Deals.

Goldshteyn, Hilaire, Shklovsky, and Williams are all accused of using eBay auctions to distribute counterfeit copies of Windows XP Professional and Microsoft Office components, while Hornreich, Smith, and Great Product Deals are accused only of distributing counterfeit Windows XP software components on eBay, according to Microsoft. The company claims Chandra used eBay to distribute counterfeit Office 2003 Student and Teacher Edition software.

Microsoft said it identified seven of the eight defendants in the eBay suits through its Windows Genuine Advantage program. The program, launched in July 2005, automatically determines whether customers using Windows Update, Microsoft Update for Windows, and the Microsoft Download Center have a legitimate version of the Windows operating system before they can download updates or new content from those services. Microsoft filed eight lawsuits in September 2005 against defendants it said were identified in part through Windows Genuine Advantage.

Microsoft also learned about some of the latest defendants' actions through its antipiracy hot line, 800/RU-LEGIT (785-3448), the company said.

Windows Genuine Advantage is part of an ongoing effort in the past several years by Microsoft to prevent the piracy of its software products. At the time of its launch, the program met with mixed reviews from customers and was immediately hacked so users could avoid running the program when accessing Microsoft update services. Microsoft has since repaired the flaw that allowed users to bypass Windows Genuine Advantage.

According to a joint report by commercial software advocacy group Business Software Alliance and research firm IDC released last year, about one of

every four software programs in the United States is pirated. In 2004, 35 percent of software programs worldwide were pirated, according to the study.

Cracking down on pirated or counterfeit versions of its software is particularly important to Microsoft, as the company is hoping customers will upgrade in droves when it ships the next major update to its Windows client OS, Windows Vista, later this year.

Microsoft also is launching a stripped-down and low-cost edition of Vista that it hopes to sell in emerging software markets, especially in third-world countries where analysts say software piracy continues to be a major problem.

Computer Researchers Warn of Net Attacks

A new variety of unusually powerful Internet attacks can overwhelm popular Web sites and disrupt e-mails by exploiting the computers that help manage global Internet traffic, according to security researchers.

First detected late last year, the new attacks direct such massive amounts of spurious data against victim computers that even flagship technology companies could not cope. In one of the early cases examined, the unknown assailant apparently seized control of an Internet name server in South Africa and deliberately corrupted its contents.

Name servers are specialized computers that help direct Internet traffic to its destinations.

The attacker then sent falsified requests to the compromised directory computer, which unleashed overwhelming floods of amplified data aimed wherever the attacker wanted.

Experts traced at least 1,500 attacks that briefly shut down commercial Web sites, large Internet providers and leading Internet infrastructure companies during a period of weeks. The attacks were so targeted that most Internet users did not notice widespread effects.

Ken Silva, the chief security officer for VeriSign Inc., compared the scale of attacks to the damage caused in October 2002 when nine of the 13 computer "root" servers that manage global Internet traffic were crippled by a powerful electronic attack. VeriSign operates two of the 13 root server computers, but its machines were unaffected.

"This is significantly larger than what we saw in 2002, by an order of magnitude," Silva said.

Silva said the attacks earlier this year used only about 6 percent of the more than 1 million name servers across the Internet to flood victim networks. Still, the attacks in some cases exceeded 8 gigabits per second, indicating a remarkably powerful electronic assault.

"This would be the Katrina of Internet storms," Silva said.

The U.S. Computer Emergency Readiness Team, a partnership with the Homeland Security Department, warned network engineers in December to properly configure their name servers to prevent hackers from using them in attacks.

It called the attacks "troublesome" because name servers must operate to help direct Internet traffic.

Experts call the attack technique a "distributed reflector denial of service."

New Trojan Kidnaps Files for Ransom

A new type of Trojan is making the rounds on the Internet, hijacking files and then leaving messages for the victims, demanding a ransom to return access.

Called "Cryzip" by some antivirus firms and "Zippo.a" by others, the Trojan blocks access to files stored in 44 formats - including .doc, .jpg, and .pdf - by grouping them in a password-protected .zip file. The Trojan then deletes the original files and eliminates itself.

Left behind along with the encrypted files is a ransom note, riddled with grammatical and spelling errors, that demands that users pay $300 in electronic currency to gain access to their files. The author of the note and Trojan writes that reporting the incident to the police will not help because "they do not know password."

A text file includes instructions for victims to transfer money to one of nearly 100 accounts run by money-transfer site e-gold.

Security firms are reporting that the virus does not appear to be widespread at this point. And the security community already has rushed to respond to the threat, with security firms Sophos and LURHQ cracking the password required to release the data.

The companies have made public the method for foiling the Trojan, which therefore limits the danger of kidnapped data. Those who have had their files blocked simply need to type:

"C:\Program Files\Microsoft Visual Studio\VC98"

Because the string appears inside projects compiled with Visual C++ 6, the Trojan’s author probably assumed anyone who found the infected file and looked at the strings would overlook the password, LURHQ noted in its advisory.

The creation of a Trojan designed to carry out extortion is not surprising to many security researchers. In a recent Internet security threat report, Symantec noted that a growing concern is the number of attackers now motivated by financial gain rather than notoriety.

Although phishing attacks are getting the majority of attention these days, there has been some increase in Internet extortion activity as well, said Javier Santoyo, development manager at Symantec Security Response.

"Certainly there are some hackers focused on hitting companies to get resources or system benefits," he said. "Some spend weeks figuring out how to break into specific sites." So far, however, few have pursued extortion as a goal, he added.

According to security firm Sophos, this recent Trojan extortion threat is

among the first to appear in English. Previous "ransomware" schemes have come from Russia and have been targeted at Russian computer users.

Judge to Order Google to Turn Over Records

A federal judge said Tuesday he intends to order Google Inc. to turn over some of its Internet records to the U.S. Justice Department, but expressed reservations about requiring the company to divulge some of its most sensitive data - the actual requests that people enter into its popular search engine.

U.S. District Judge James Ware told the Justice Department it can expect to get at least some of the information sought from Google as part of the Bush administration’s effort to revive a law meant to shield children from online pornography.

But Ware stressed he was "particularly concerned" about the Justice Department’s demand for a random sample of search requests entered into Google’s Internet-leading search engine.

The judge said he didn’t want to do anything to create the perception that Internet search engines and other large online databases could become tools for government surveillance. He seemed less concerned about requiring Google to supply the government with a random list of Web sites indexed by the company.

Ware said he planned to issue a written ruling quickly.

After the 90-minute hearing, Google attorney Nicole Wong said the company was pleased with Ware’s thoughtful questions.

Justice Department spokesman Charles Miller said the agency looks forward to Ware’s decision. "We hope his opinion will demonstrate the government’s belief that this info would be helpful in protecting the nation’s youth against potentially harmful material," he said.

During the hearing, another Google attorney, Albert Gidari, tried to persuade Ware that the government could get virtually all the information it wanted from publicly accessible services offered by Amazon.com Inc.’s Alexa.com and InfoSpace Inc.’s Dogpile.com.

T. Barton Carter, a communications and law professor at Boston University, said the concerns raised by Ware should be heartening to privacy rights advocates, but cautioned against reading too much into the judge’s comments until his written order.

"What’s going to be important is whether he limits the information (given to the government) and whether he explains why he drew the line where he did," Carter said.

Investors seemed encouraged by Tuesday’s developments as Google’s recently slumping stock price surged $14.10, or 4.2 percent, to close at $351.16 on the Nasdaq Stock Market.

Tuesday marked the first time that Google and the Justice Department have faced off in court over a government subpoena issued nearly seven months ago. The Justice Department initially wanted a breakdown of search requests

and Web site addresses from Google for a study that the government believes will prove filtering software doesn't prevent children from viewing sexually explicit material on the Internet.

Google refused to hand over the information, even as three other major search engines turned over some of the requested data. Mountain View-based Google maintained the government's request would intrude on its users' privacy and its trade secrets.

Google's protests prompted the government to scale back its requests dramatically. Justice Department attorney Joel McElvain told Ware Tuesday that the government now wants a random sampling of 50,000 Web site addresses indexed by Google and the text of 5,000 random search requests.

McElvain said just 10,000 of the Web sites and 1,000 of the search requests would be used in a study for a Pennsylvania case revolving around the online child pornography law that has been blocked by the U.S. Supreme Court. That case is scheduled for an Oct. 23 trial.

The Justice Department plans to use the search requests to show how easy it is for online pornographers to fool Internet filters, hoping that it will help demonstrate the need for a tougher law to protect children from the material.

The government's scaled-back requests have minimized Google's concerns about sharing confidential company information, but the privacy issues remain troublesome, Gidari told Ware.

Although the government doesn't want Google to turn over anything that would identify a person making a search request, Gidari said the content of certain queries often contains sensitive information about finances, Social Security numbers and sexual preferences.

Indicating he was thinking about only granting part of the government's request, Ware asked Gidari if Google would rather hand over the Web site addresses or a list of people's search requests. Without providing a definitive answer, Gidari said Google believed an order requiring the company to surrender people's search requests would have a "chilling effect" on the Internet.

Steve Mansfield, chief executive of a recently launched search engine called PreFound.com, said the entire industry will get a lift if Ware prevents the government from getting a glimpse at Google's search requests.

"This entire case has become about public perception," Mansfield said. "If people perceive that what they are putting into a search engine isn't private, that's going to be a big negative for everyone."

Pressed by Ware, McElvain acknowledged the Justice Department had already obtained enough information from other search engines to conduct its study. "But the study would be improved with Google's data," he said.

Yahoo Inc., Microsoft Corp.'s MSN and Time Warner Inc.'s AOL have turned over some search engine information to the Justice Department. All three companies said they complied with the government subpoena without compromising their users' privacy.

The government will have to reimburse Google for whatever costs that the company incurs. Google has estimated it will take its engineers five to eight days to extract the data requested by the Justice Department.

New Browsers Prove a Tough Sell

Opera Software recently became one of the few browser makers to pass the Acid2 test and while that may earn the company bragging rights in the developer community, it's unlikely to convince more Web users to switch from Microsoft's Internet Explorer, one analyst said.

Opera initially proposed the creation of the Acid2 test as a way to highlight the lack of support for some standard HTML (Hypertext Markup Language) and CSS (Cascading Style Sheet) features in Internet Explorer (IE) and other browsers, said Hakon Lie, chief technology officer for Opera. The Web Standards Project (WaSP), an independent group that supports the use of standards in browsers, created and hosts the test.

To pass the test, a browser must be able to accurately display the test page. Opening the page with IE reveals a large red block with some spots on it. A browser that passes the test, however, will display a smiley face and the words "hello world."

Apple Computer's Safari was the first to pass the test last year. It took until last week, about a full year's worth of work, to tweak the Opera browser enough to pass the test, Wie said.

If more browsers support the features in the test, designers will be able to create better sites, he said. Developers often feel they can't use some available tools because they aren't supported in IE, the most widely used browser, Wie said. "There's a reluctance for developers to use features that aren't widely supported. The least advanced browser holds things back," he said.

Last year, Chris Wilson, a developer working for Microsoft on IE, wrote in a blog posting that Microsoft wasn't planning to ensure that IE7, the next version of IE that is currently available as a beta, could pass the Acid2 test. He describes the Acid2 test as a broad wish list of browser features that goes beyond standard CSS and HTML. However, even though IE7 won't pass the test, Acid2 has been helpful to Microsoft as an indicator of features that are important to developers, he said.

WaSP said it included features that Web designers want and that are based on Web standards in the test.

Trying to win customers from IE by touting support for additional design features is a tough sell for the competitive browsers, said Iris Cremers, an analyst with Forrester Research. "That's not going to do the trick. There's really no novelty there," she said. A recent Forrester study found that most Web users perceive that a browser's job is to display Web pages and that the pages will largely look the same no matter what browser they use.

Browser developers will have to create very innovative changes to the way browsers are used to encourage more customers to switch from IE, she said. That's increasingly difficult since many of the features that some browsers include to add value, such as pop-up blockers or improved security, are now offered by separate stand-alone software, she said.

Forrester research shows that so far the competitive browsers haven't

delivered the necessary features to drive mass adoption. A recent Forrester study showed that 59 percent of Web users in North America and 69 percent in Europe use IE. Despite the buzz around competitive browsers, last year just 13 percent of Web users in North America switched their browser, the study found.

Microsoft Slips, Says Vista Ships In November

For a little while Tuesday, Microsoft said it would ship Windows Vista in November, but within hours the entry on the "Official Microsoft Connections" event blog had been changed to the standard company line "second half of this year."

Although Microsoft watchers have occasionally been compared to Kremlinologists, guessing the release date of Vista, the Redmond, Wash.-based developer’s next desktop operating system, has been a game to more than just outsiders: last month, Microsoft itself launched a contest that let developers guess the day.

Monday, the game of guess-the-date seemed to be over as Microsoft employee Greg Randall, identified on the site as Team Lead, Small Business Webcasts, revealed "This is the year the year that Microsoft releases the newest version of Windows. Yes, Vista will be released in November of this year."

As late as Tuesday morning, the entry - on a site Microsoft dedicates to a program of free small business seminars it hosts countrywide - held to the November release.

By Tuesday afternoon, however, the blog had been redacted to read "This is the year the year that Microsoft releases the newest version of Windows. We are targeting to make Windows Vista generally available in the second half of this year, and the exact delivery date will ultimately be determined by the quality of the product."

While earlier scuttlebutt about Vista’s roll-out date had tagged months from August to December, the most recent seemed to have settled on early October. Late last month, for example, TG Daily, the news arm of the popular Tom’s Hardware site, had claimed inside sources indicated the operating system would launch somewhere between Oct. 2 and Oct. 6.

Vista’s release date has implications on earnings during calendar 2006 for not only Microsoft, but also OEM vendors who are expecting to have the OS in hand early enough to post product in the channel before year’s end.

Virtual Medical Checkups on the Rise

Wayne Wilson is cheered when the computerized voice tells him his blood pressure and heart rate are holding steady.

The 82-year-old stays on top of his health with weekly checkups at an electronic kiosk in the lobby of the Beverwyck assisted-living home. On this day, he finds out he’s even lost half a pound.

"That means I can have ice cream tonight," he says.

Wilson is part of a growing number of people monitoring their vital signs through "telemedicine," which allows health care providers to perform checkups by video.

The technology can be as basic as the kiosks Wilson uses, which transmit blood pressure and weight readings to a remote facility monitored by a nurse. On more sophisticated devices, live doctors appear on a screen to listen to everything from a patient’s heartbeats to lung waves. Some machines let patients aim a camera at injuries so doctors can instruct them how to properly dress a wound.

While the technology shouldn’t replace face-to-face consultations, American Medical Association president J. Edward Hill agrees that it can greatly enhance the patient-physician relationship.

Advocates say telemedicine can also save valuable time and money in caring for those who require frequent medical attention - particularly in the face of a national nursing shortage.

For patients, the technology gives peace of mind.

"I want to make sure I’m alive every morning," jokes 87-year-old Thomas DiFrancesco, one of the 50 residents at the Beverwyck in Albany who use the kiosk.

Though there is little hard data tracking its growth, there is mounting evidence that more people are using telemedicine.

The number of companies manufacturing home telecare devices in the last three years has tripled to 15 and the Veterans Administration plans to double the number of patients it puts on home telecare to 20,000 over the next year, said Jonathan Linkous, executive director of the American Telemedicine Association.

About 3,500 hospitals, clinics, schools and other facilities use telemedicine today, up from 2,000 six years ago, he said.

Several studies show that patients who use telemedicine make fewer trips to emergency rooms and hospitals. One study by Kaiser Permanente compared two groups of 100 patients and found the group that used the technology cut hospitalizations by 200 days from May 1996 to November 1997.

Health care providers can catch warning signs early and take action to prevent a stroke or heart attack, said Johanna Lupoli, an Eddy VNA nurse who specializes in delivering telemedicine.

Patients also tend to be less alarmed by symptoms when they have medical assistance at their fingertips, said Cheryl Articola, program manager at Eddy Visiting Nurse Association in Troy.

At Eddy VNA, patients who started using home telecare saw a 29 percent reduction in emergency room visits and a 37 percent reduction in hospitalizations.

The association is also able to reach more patients in remote areas, a major convenience for those living hours away, especially during rough winter months.

"We can cover 13 counties with this," Articola said.

Eddy started using home telecare five years ago with a dozen units. Now it has nearly 200, and three insurers have agreed to cover the costs associated with it.

A growing number of states with a lot of rural areas, including Minnesota, offer Medicaid coverage for telemedicine. That’s not the case in New York, but state officials are showing interest in the technology.

Some 40 agencies in New York state employ about 1,000 home telecare units. That’s set to rise to about 1,500 after the state Health Department rolls out $4 million in grants this year to help agencies invest in the technology, said Alexis Silver, spokeswoman for the Homecare Association of New York State.

"It saves time, money, can be done instantaneously," Silver said. "This is going to become as common as a cell phone in our industry."

Discovery Channel Launches Homework Help Web Site

A new Discovery Channel homework Web site aims to remind parents whose math and history knowledge has gotten rusty how to help their children with the very things they have forgotten.

Cosmeo, a new online subscription site from Discovery Communications, offers a range of tools from a WebMath equation solver to educational videos and subject-specific Brain Games.

Launched on Monday, the site targets Web-savvy children from kindergarten through 12th grade. It also gives parents and other caretakers a way to be more involved in the learning process while refreshing their own knowledge, said Judith McHale, president and chief executive of Discovery Communications.

"Finally, you can look smart in front of your child," she joked.

Cosmeo is located at http://www.cosmeo.com and costs $9.95 per month or $99 per year. Other features include interactive quizzes, a digital encyclopedia and a digital photo library.

The service is built on Discovery’s unitedstreaming, an educational video streaming service used in more than 70,000 schools. Cosmeo’s search functions serve up age- or grade-appropriate content, which is also tailored to match state curriculum requirements.

Google Launches Interactive Map of Mars

First there was Google Earth, then Google Moon. On Monday, Google Inc. expanded its galactic reach by launching Google Mars, a Web browser-based mapping tool that gives users an up-close, interactive view of the Red Planet with the click of a mouse.

The Martian maps were made from images taken by NASA’s orbiting Mars Odyssey and Mars Global Surveyor.

Google Mars doesn't provide driving directions, but users can see the planet in three different formats: The Martian elevation map is color-coded by altitude; the visible-imagery map shows the surface in black-and-white pictures; the infrared map indicates temperature, with cooler areas dark and warmer areas bright.

Users can also zoom in on any of the three maps to view geographical features such as mountains, canyons, dunes and craters. The maps also pinpoint the locations of unmanned space probes that have landed on Mars.

The up-to-date maps even include the locations of the NASA rovers Spirit and Opportunity, which have been exploring opposite ends of the planet since 2004, said Phil Christensen, an Arizona State University planetary geologist who operates an infrared camera on the Mars Odyssey. Arizona State partnered with Google to create the maps.

While countless Mars images are already available on the Internet - mostly through NASA's Mars mission Web sites - the developers of Google Mars said this is the first time that members of the public can explore Mars on their own.

"The idea is to look at Mars and not think of it as a mysterious alien place," Christensen said.

Christensen said the Martian maps would most likely be updated every few weeks.

Last week, another spacecraft, the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter, successfully slipped into orbit around the planet, joining the Mars Odyssey and Mars Global Surveyor.

Since the Reconnaissance Orbiter is the most powerful spacecraft ever to orbit Mars, Christensen said, scientists may eventually incorporate its data into Google Mars.

Last summer, the Mountain View-based Internet search engine unveiled Google Earth, a three-dimensional, satellite-based mapping service that allowed browsers to interactively explore their neighborhood or far-flung places.

Google Earth was followed by Google Moon, which showed the locations of all six Apollo moon landings.

Google launched its Martian mapping service on what would have been the 151st birthday of astronomer Percival Lowell, who studied the Red Planet for more than two decades.

"We hope you enjoy your trip to Mars," Chikai Ohazama, a Google Earth team member, wrote in a blog posted on the search engine's Web site.

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